

TestimonySenate Education and Cultural Resources CommitteeSenate Bill 457, February 19, 2007Mark Beckman, Executive Director – Montana High School Association

Senator Ryan and members of the committee, my name is Mark Beckman and I am the Executive Director of the Montana High School Association. This proposed change to the duties of the Board of Public Education would adversely affect the Montana High School Association and its ability to regulate and administer activity programs for our 180 member high schools. I would like to share with you some brief background information on the MHSA.

Any public or private high school, accredited by the Montana State Board of Public Education, may become a member of the MHSA. The MHSA is a private non-profit Association that is regulated by public organizations – those public organizations are our member schools and their school boards.

In 1921, a group of Montana high school administrators met in Helena and organized the Montana High School Athletic Association to assure participants the opportunity to participate in equitable, well organized programs. A full time office was established in 1952.

The purpose of the MHSA is to provide leadership for the development, supervision, and promotion of interscholastic competition and other activities in which its member schools participate. These policies and rules of the Association are designed to provide maximum benefits consistent with sound educational practices for every student in every school.

The MHSA operates under a true democracy by conducting an Annual meeting each year in January where each member school votes on proposals submitted by any member school for consideration. The Association also has a representative form of governance with a seven member Executive Board— there are four members elected from each school classification and one member appointed by the Governor, one appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and one appointed by the Montana School Boards Association. The MHSA also has eight standing committees and ten individual sports committees where issues are discussed and reviewed and recommendations are sent to the Board or to the membership for consideration.

The MHSA is a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations. The Federation writes rules for all major sports and activities and all 50 state high school associations are members of the National Federation and follow Federation rules.

If there are any rules that are adopted by the Federation that any member school believes to be unnecessary or too costly to implement that school can submit a proposal at the MHSA Annual Meeting to have the entire membership vote on suspending that portion of the Federation rules. The Federation always allows at least a three year notice before implementing a rule change which has a financial impact. The member schools have suspended certain Federation rules in other sports such as in wrestling for weight classes and weight management – Federation weight management procedures have not been adopted by our member schools because of the expense for schools for body fat and hydration testing. The school administrators would vote on any proposal, of course, with direction from their elected school board members.

Also if there was any interest in adding a new activity for the MHSA (like bowling, hockey etc.) the process is to bring a proposal at the Annual Meeting to create a committee to thoroughly research the activity and report back at the next Annual Meeting and have the 180 member schools vote on whether to add the activity after reviewing the committee's findings – it is a three year detailed process.

I know there are other groups who will speak against this rule because of the impact it would have on schools and their ability to administer their programs at the local level whether offering a raise to their coaches, wanting to purchase new equipment, requiring drug testing for student activity participants or to consider adding a sport or an activity in their high school, all decisions that definitely are the responsibility

of the local school board. But in regard to the MHSA, I firmly believe this requirement is not necessary because if a requirement that would increase cost is introduced by a member school, the MHSA Executive Board or by the National Federation – the schools have the opportunity to vote on the issue and decide whether to adopt the policy. In fact, every action that is taken by the MHSA Board that increases costs etc. is sent to the member schools for a two week notice period and final action isn't taken until the next Board meeting when all the comments and concerns from schools have been reviewed and considered. Schools are making informed decisions of what proposals are approved through their trustees who give direction to their administrators.

The MHSA provides a valuable service to the high schools of Montana; in fact the MHSA is the 180 high schools of our great state. The schools, through their administrators and trustees, have the final say in any programs the Association provides and those schools monitor the costs of providing such services. The membership also approves the annual budget of the MHSA and this year the membership unanimously approved a minimal 2% increase in the overall budget from last year.

The MHSA through its member schools and with those schools' oversight is doing an excellent job of providing and administering fiscally responsible high school activity programs for the thousands of students who participate each year. I urge a no vote on this bill. Thank you for your time.